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enrich the soil. Now before a field is chosen for cutting, it must be surveyed carefully to see that there are no snakes to be injured; that no trees which have strong spirits like the silk-cotton tree, or the parasitic akatasi, will be destroyed; that no ant hill whether on the ground or on a tree be disturbed. But Kasanya's wife's mother's brother was careless, or unlucky. A small ant hill had escaped his notice.

"The *Akantamasu* god is powerful. It is a bad god," Kasanya said over and over, making of it a refrain to his story.

When the ant hill was destroyed, its spirit fixed itself upon the family. Kasanya's wife's mother became ill, and although the contents of one obia pot after another were used up in bathing her with sangrafu and the serabaki and chembe leaves, she did not get better. Her husband, an able obia man, made special charms for her to wear about her neck, and sprinkled her with medicine with the feather of the sacred opete, the vulture, but still her illness kept on. At last they went to a diviner. To the village of Dahomey they went, the village where the most powerful obia was lodged, and there she learned that the Akantamasu god had come to the family. The diviner told her how to serve the god so that she might have respite—the days that were sacred to him, the dances she must dance on these days, the sacrifices to make. They knew that it would never be a friendly god to them, for it had come as a kunu. There was more trouble and more. The family gave many offerings, and the possessed woman danced whenever the spirit seized her, but soon she died, and the others have been dying since.

"What happened to the man who destroyed the ant hill? Did he get the Akantamasu gadu?"

"No, not he himself. His mother, and his sister, and his sister's children."

"But why?"

The answer was that kunu worked that way, and he went on to tell us about his sons. The first son had gone to the

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be possessed by them. Between the roots of the tree offerings were placed—two or three bottles on their sides, or a calabash filled with sacred clay.

When the time came to dance to the gods of the kankan tree, a tunic of cotton was placed about its trunk. While the drums spoke to the gods, white clay was spread over the bark, a chicken was killed, and its blood allowed to spray the tree and drip into a calabash placed on the ground to receive it. Eggs inside obia pots were put beside the tree, and bottles filled with sweet liquor and the juice of sugar cane. All about its wide trunk the dancers swayed and leaped, each dancing to her own spirit until, at the height of their ecstasy, there were a few among them who would climb the great tree itself, and dance on its branches. The drums continued until the frenzy ebbed. Had they stopped sooner, those in the tree could not have remained there safely or in safety have descended to the ground.

At other times, women came to Gedeonsu to ask him for children, and those who were troubled by his spirit brought offerings, though the great dances were held when the old year came to an end, and the big offerings were then made.

"If a man were to cut down a kankan tree, Gedeonsu would cut off his foot. I myself saw it happen," said a man to us at S'ei. "And his sister got the god."

The kankan tree gods could be bought, too. A woman who wanted fertility would seek to buy Gedeonsu. Others might wish to have Tinné. Only an individual who had a spirit which gave him the right to make obias and call the gods could get the spirit for one who wished to buy it. Such a man would take an obia pot, fill it with water and place inside it cowrie shells which had not been cleansed. After speaking his invocation, he would add a sacred white stone, called an obia stone, and with a calabash in one hand and a bell in the other, he would go to the tree and address the spirits as he rang the bell. When the water became ruffled, it was a sign that the god had entered it. Quickly he would cover the calabash with a cloth and take it away with him.

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village. A household was not confined to one building only, but few who were not men of rank and means had more than three. One was for the woman and her children, another for storing the crops, and the third was the man's treasure house, where women might not come. It was like the matter of wives. Only men of position could afford more than one. But if a man had two wives and both lived in his village, then perhaps five huts would bear a design identified with him on the carved side posts which outlined the low doorway. This design would recur in the various carvings he had made for his women—it was his crest. And though a man from another village, who was not related to him, might like it, and liking it copy it, this practice would be socially frowned upon.

A village quarter, however, did not contain only dwelling places, and storehouses, and men's treasure houses. Certain families also had in their part of the village an enclosed shrine for the family gods. If in a given family a powerful Vodu, or snake god, had come to an ancestress and had in a dream, or in a seizure, or through a revelation made to an obia man, chosen her as his *'asi*—his priestess or medium—then with this disclosure came the instructions for the place of locating a house of worship to that Vodu, and the type of house it was to be. Such a shrine, once erected, would be kept in the quarter, and worshiped by the members of that family. Sometimes in front of a dwelling hut, a low enclosure, the size of a small kennel, would stand a little to the side of the door. This was a house to Tonê, the river spirit. In one such house lived a woman who had a great Tonê god. She had the gift of prophecy. When the men gathered for a council meeting in the village of the Granman, then she, too, would sometimes be bidden to come and sit with the men, though, being a woman, she could never speak at council meetings.

"Touch her skin," the other women said, pointing out this albino woman, "and you will have your desires fulfilled."

In each quarter, too, there was an open house where the women did their cooking, and perhaps a platform or two,

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As we made a tour of the village, we discussed all this with the chief and his bassia, and with the other men who accompanied us. When we reached the open place sacred to the great gods, we stopped. The shrine was a fenced-in space, perhaps eight or nine feet long and almost as wide. Inside was a slender pole, with a head carved on its top, and a cotton tunic about its middle, and this was the wife of the Great God, the chief said. The ladder with the platform on it, on which stood a bottle, was the shrine of the great Sky God. At the base of the image with the tunic were several bottles, some white clay, and a few empty glasses, and everywhere were sticks with cloth on them, many with the cloth in tatters. Where the cotton had altogether rotted away, the stick alone remained.

"Let us go in," said the chief to the men.

With the chief came a young man whose hair was braided, and who wore several obias on neck and arms. He was training to become an obia man. The bassia signaled us to follow, but the others remained outside.

The young man took up a bottle and poured some of its contents into an earthen jar, and from the jar he poured out a libation to the Earth Mother. The captain prayed, explaining that we were white people on our way to the Granman, that he was leaving in the morning to notify the Granman of our approach. Would the gods take him and us in safety, and would they see to it that all we saw should be seen with the eyes of friendship? Then he prayed for a child in the village who was ill, and for his people, and for the clan of the Granman, the Matchau lo, and for his own family. After each prayer he paused, and those outside the paling clapped their hands and sang out, "Great thanks."

Before the chief's prayer was finished, an old man came by with a bush knife in his belt, and his gun. He was just then returning from the hunt, and he stopped to thank the great gods for the kill he had made. He spoke in a whisper, but his intonation was as conversational as the chief's had been.

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yet his findings might in time serve the enemy. We were soldiers bringing toys, as the image of the krutu had suggested. 123

Since life in the bush, for strangers like ourselves, was lived in terms of days, and each day was taken for what it might bring, we were grateful to those gods who had spoken for us, and watched the effect of the ancestral edict.

Before dawn of the day which followed the ceremony of asking the will of the ancestors, men came to counsel with the Granman, and from then onward many men were about the village. The young boys found their toy guns again, and the little girls played on the river bank. The widow who was so susceptible to evil influences no longer appeared in the central clearing with her child on her back, stamping her rice, or drying her peanuts. Her door was shut. Fenekonde was no longer about, for she had gone to the menstrual house, and Tenemi who came to sweep the council house each morning now wore a new obia on a long, twisted, white cord, hung from shoulder to side. She was polite, formal, and she worked fast.

Late that afternoon the obia man who had appeared at the first council meeting with wide stripes of clay came again, and his wife accompanied him. They were the best diviners on the river. From the corner of the council house the large mat which had been standing rolled up was carried into a closed hut, so that he might sit on it, and perform his magic to see what the future held for the destiny of the Saramacca people, and what immediate threat the white man's coming boded. Before leaving for the hut where the mat was prepared the man and woman sat with us in the council house in the company of the Granman. They apparently needed to know our individual names for their task. While we sat there, the white woman absently began to play with the obia about her neck, and this seemed a signal for the other woman to take hers into her hands and begin to mutter an invocation, for the stranger's careless playing appeared to her as the white man's way of casting a spell. 123 791 787 [285]

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532 fascinated. It showed, in its purest form, the retention of the African mask-like head. Sometimes on the prow of a boat we would see in cruder form the outlines of a mask, and once an old woman came with a food stirrer to us. Its handle ended in a knob which with a few strokes of the knife had been formed into a double representation of the human [191] head, a perfect parallel to the type of mask that is associated with the people of the Ivory Coast.

532 191 Aside from the decorated apinti drum, only some of the workaday art forms of Africa—combs, paddles, mortars, among other such objects—were retained. For their decoration the designs that in Africa had been cut into the base of figures or about the borders of masks had been remembered and reinterpreted in terms of the ancestral cults. And from those memories the Bush Negroes had developed the unique art which is theirs.

532 181 84 Thus, in the main, the art was symbolic, and many of the designs represented the urge for reproduction. Some stemmed from the fertility cult, though not entirely of it. There was, for example, the double-bladed food stirrer, which was given by a man to his wife with a curse woven [626] into its curves for the woman if she committed adultery.

532 There were carvings that did not deal with sex at all. On the lower river we sat on the shore as a canoe came up. Prow and stern were carved. On one of the seats was a representation of the head of a feline, done with the utmost realism.

"You have *tigri*?" we asked the man, as we bargained for the seats.

"I will sell you this, but do not ask me what it means."

The bird-headed paddles were also examples of this kind. [501] When laid on their sides, they showed the form of the parrot, or whatever bird they represented—the exaggerated beak, the head, the neck, the wings, and the feet. The design called *Alukutu folo*, an emblem of those who ● [791] could see into the future, was engraved on many benches on the upper river in particular, and these carvings were parted with only with the greatest reluctance, lest we try

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"Suma de, ai," he acknowledged.

6

Bayo remained in the bush, but he did not come to the city with us, though he took us into the Awka villages as captain of our boat. While at the base camp, he busied himself with making small models of traps and snares, and whatever other examples of Bush Negro work we needed to augment our collection.

He was a poor weaver, for he was no craftsman at all. But on the river he showed almost superhuman strength, and his knowledge of obia and the gods showed his potentialities for achieving what he most desired—to become an obia man. It may well be that his great kunu had planted this ambition in him. Perhaps, if he became a renowned obia man, one of the greatest on the river, he would outwit the combined power of ancestors and gods. His physical strength was such that all seemed possible to him, and his eye was quick, his curiosity unbounded. As a child of incest, a twofold member of his clan, he had certain immunities from the gods, though his line would all the more be flayed by the punishment which his parentage had earned.

"White man," he would say to us, "the next time you come, I will go with you to Africa. By then, I shall have given my wife children, and my sister's children will be grown. I want to go to Africa to learn obia."

His young brother was not strong. Bayo allowed them to cut no kamemba on the boy, who was now almost eleven, and it was clear that he would not be able to go through the Kromanti initiation, that he would have few gods.

"What will you do then, Bayo?"

God alone knew. He did not expect that even in Africa he could learn all he needed to know to help his young brother.

"Would he go with Bibifo?" we ventured, remembering that Bibifo had become Adrian.

He laughed. The white man asked many questions.

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776 important enough to be the residence of a clan chief. His
789 clan's magic was strong, and, being well past middle age, he could afford to speak of these matters with the whites, for like all Bush Negroes he was proud of the black man's obia.

"Ya-hai, white man, obia may well puzzle you. It is no small matter. No man knows all there is to know about obia. The greatest of obia men is never done learning. You
[791] say you spent more than twenty years learning your kind of work. Twenty years is nothing. All his life an obia man spends learning. The ancestors let him see a little at a time, and a little more. 'One step at a time,' as the G'ama' says. So it is, white man."

When did the learning begin, we asked him?

869 "In the bush here, children see what we do, and they
776 learn much by watching. They learn to recognize the kind
778 of obias a man wears, they learn to know the names of obias, and about the *tchina*—taboos—that go with the wearing of obias. That is the beginning." All children knew that, but only boys could aspire to learn the secrets of obia.

A boy's definite training in these things began with adolescence. The ceremony was not formal, for it concerned only the boy and his immediate relatives. When the time came to teach the novice about the gods, his father and
[604] his mother's brothers met with him, and they held a krutu. Other men also came, men of the village and elders of their great family. The outsiders sat by and said nothing, while
881 the instruction was carried on by the father and the boy's
869 maternal uncles.

776 "First the father gives him his gods, and he tells his son the name of each god and how he must serve him."

There were songs to be learned and dances and invocations; there were the offerings which had to be made, and the manner of prayer memorized. He was told when he might call on the god and what names the god bore, for each god had several names, just as had each human being. There were many names to learn for the gods—their day names, their "strong" names.

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anything made of iron—nor can a gun shoot him, nor an arrow pierce him. If he goes through a thicket of thorns or climbs a thorny palm tree when the spirit comes to him, he is not harmed. That is Kromanti."

"How much does a person pay an obia man for giving a boy Kromanti?" we asked.

"It costs plenty, white man. But a good obia man never asks too much. If a man says he will give the boy Kromanti, for not too many guilders, then we know he will do it. But if a man asks forty, fifty, then we know he is not an honest man, and he is not a good man. I have heard, though, of a good obia man who took as much as twenty-four guilders, but he gave the boy a strong Kromanti spirit, and it took much time to teach him."

3

From time to time members of Bayo's family visited our camp. Each time we were introduced to a new brother, or father, or *suwagi*—brother-in-law. Among these visitors was a man whose name we never learned, though we had talked with him a good deal. He was, we later came to know, a man who knew obia. He was a scholar among his people, a thoughtful man who often went about alone, instead of being accompanied by a fellow clan member or a member of his family, as is customary among these people. Like Bayo, he had an incest kunu, and at his age, he had already had occasion to see what kunu planned for him. He coughed badly. When men went to cut timber, he could not go with them because of his cough and the fever which went with the cough.

"Have you been to a good obia man?" we asked him.

He smiled. Of what use to go from one diviner to the next, from one man who had special magic to another, when a man knew that what was troubling him was kunu?

"Come to the city with us," we said, when we knew him better, "and we will take you to a doctor. He may be able to do something for you."

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He promised readily enough to go with us, but Bayo told us later that he would not come.

"He says the white doctor cannot do more than obia can do. He says a man must take what kunu brings."

Was there no obia against kunu? we asked of Bayo.

"No, but kunu is not greater than obia. It is something else. When the Sky God gave obia to man, he gave it to help man live, not to help him do bad things. When men and women earn a kunu for their family, it is because they do what is hateful to the great gods and ancestors. Obia was not sent to save men from punishment."

"Does obia never punish, Bayo?" We were thinking of what he said about his own obia, of how when it seized him, he destroyed things.

But he would say no more. "I am too young, Bak'a, to speak of these things. At my age I know only a little obia. You must ask the old men."

4

The conversation led us one day to the obia men on the river. They were, we knew, important persons in the Bush Negro communities. An obia man of reputation was not only consulted by his own villagers and clansmen, but men and women came to him from distant villages, when those who were nearer had failed them. It occurred sometimes that even from the Awka villages on the lower river, these Saramacca obia men were sought out—perhaps this was because of the same tradition which encouraged the buying of strange gods to enlarge the family pantheon, perhaps it was because of something which touched still deeper beliefs.

How did a man become an obia man?

From what we had already heard, it was apparent that here was something which approached the formal education of our own civilization, a form of education, indeed, which we pride ourselves is unique to our own way of life.

All other knowledge the Bush Negro child gains by being about with members of his family who are busy at

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the tasks which will fall to his lot when he reaches adulthood. Half in play, the boys and girls help their elders and in that way learn how to work, how to conduct themselves, how to sing and dance, how to make cicatrizations, and how to pray to the gods. What they learn when they come by their gods is also taught them by members of their family. A boy's father and maternal uncles instruct him in the gods they give him. A girl is made familiar with the will of her gods and their manner of worship when her mother and her mother's sisters give their gods to her. Knowledge is, therefore, shared in the family, and much of it, the Bush Negro says, comes to each individual from his gods, since not every boy who watches a fine carver can rival the carving of his teacher. When he does show promise of excellence at a given task, it is because he, too, has a god who helps him do his carving. It is the same with drumming, and singing, and telling stories, and making love.

But obia is learned formally and slowly. An obia man may teach his own brother, or his sister's ablest son, or his own son, even, what he knows, but the learning process will be gradual, for no man may disclose too much to an untrained mind. At times, however, an obia man trains men who are not related to him. He may himself decide upon a young man of promise to whom he cares to impart his knowledge. A considerable sum of money may be offered him by members of an influential family who wish to have an obia man of their own kin and who send a young man to him for training. In a dream or during possession it may become known that the ancestors wish a certain young man to apprentice himself to the obia man they name.

The apprenticeship lasts from three months to a year. The novice goes to live with the obia man, working with him and observing all that his master does. During this period of intensive training he goes with the obia man into the bush and is shown the herbs which heal. He is trained in the manner of bathing for the *ak'a*—the soul—

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and how to cure fever, and fio-fio. He is shown how to make obia medicine for lesions of the skin, and for colds, and for diseases of children. He is taught the protective obias for the woman who conceives, and those which help conception, the obias which keep people safe on the river, and those which guard them in the bush against enemy spirits.

It may be, too, that during this first period of training, the initiate is shown how to trap and treat the snakes from which the snake "cuttee" is made. This cure for snake bite is famous in Suriname among Bush Negroes and whites alike, but the secret of preparing the cuttee is known to the Bush Negroes alone.

While the young man is in training, he may not go with a woman, and there are many more prohibitions which he must observe.

"Not all men can become obia men."

"Does a man need obia in order to have Kromanti?" we asked.

"To have Obia Kromanti, yes. . . . Now do not ask about Kromanti, white man," said Bayo's uncle with a smile. "Only a Kromanti man knows about Kromanti. Do not ask, because I cannot tell you."

5

Men and women constantly drifted to our base camp with carvings for our collection. Many brought us obias. Some of these obias they took from their persons and sold to us, but others were newly made for us, for some of those they themselves wore, they would not part with, whatever the inducement.

"Why do you want my obia, white man?" a Bush Negro asked one day. "Do you want an obia to carry you well to your country? I will make one for you, but do not ask for mine. Mine has kept me in good health. I cannot give away an obia which has served me well. The spirits would be angered."

He returned after a day with one which resembled his own, and as he gave it, he placed it on the upturned palms

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But if the tchina are too difficult to observe, then the man who made the obia can take the tchina away."

Suiting his action to the word, Bayo took some water from the river into his mouth and, spraying it over the obia, said, "The tchina I gave you, I take away. The breaking of these tchina must no longer defile you or take away your power."

There was nothing more hateful to the gods and the spirit of obia than an unclean woman, yet if an obia man wished, he could instruct the power in the obia not to take offense at unintentional contacts with menstruating women, or at cloths belonging to such women, or at food prepared by such women. But to accomplish this, an obia man had to be very powerful and, even so, he could not feel sure that the obia spirit would countenance such violations indefinitely.

All of these personal obias had definite attributes. One was made to guard an individual on the water, another in the bush. There were obias for successful hunting and fishing, for being safe against the evil spirits at the crossroads, for slander, and for envy. One obia saw to it that the soul remained strong, another that no illness sent by an enemy might lodge itself in the body of the wearer; there were love obias, and fighting obias, and obias which kept ghosts away.

Yet whatever such obias were made of, the object in itself had no validity. A simple fiber with a jaguar's tooth attached to it might well have greater powers for safety in the bush than an elaborately wrought obia, whose maker had not a strong obia spirit to give it spiritual power. Without this supernatural potency, it would be like a village god that had been allowed to rot because of itself it was merely a block of wood, and the deity for whom it had been made had not come to animate it.

6

Long ago, the Anansi stories tell us, there was a bird that knew obia. The cries of this bird shook all the kingdoms

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One also often finds as an avowed goal the idea of being useful to his lineage.

Disinterested mystical impulses appear totally absent from these cults.

But that is only one aspect of the phenomena of possession; they really seem to be, in large measure, unconscious and involuntary. Everyone can try to obtain a gadu, but everyone does not succeed; one must have a certain predisposition. "One cannot oblige a gadu to enter a man," say the Boni; it certainly seems, in fact, that in nearly half the cases possession takes place spontaneously and sometimes to the great terror of the person concerned: this is observed especially in the kunu.

Mimi, a woman about 46 years old in 1958, of the Kotika lineage, was possessed by two gadu, an Ampuku and a Papa gadu. Here is how her near relatives relate the fashion in which they came into her.

About ten years before, Mimi was showing signs of mental derangement. Her mind wandered, she sometimes used to leave the village to run in the bush at random, she uttered disconnected words (1). Then she fell very ill (pleurisy?).

1. It is necessary to note on this subject the very widely held idea among the Refugee Blacks, as among the Creoles, that certain forms of mental imbalance are due to the action of an entity which is trying to manifest itself in a man and does not succeed. In order to cure this man, he must be "washed" with appropriate leaves so that the god can come to manifest itself in him; the rest of the time he will be normal.

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The elders then consulted the oracles and perceived that Mimi was victim of an Ampuku named Maogan which for a very long time had been pursuing the Kotika lineage with its vengeance (kunu). In order to protect herself, she sought to have herself given a more powerful god, and she became the pupil of an obiaman specialist in the cult of the Papa gadu. In this way she had a Papa gadu named Ayaémé, divinity of beneficent character to which, in difficult cases, her family applies in order to obtain advice, protection, and remedies. She had a little hut built beside her house, where the god goes to rest when it has finished each of its trips to the country of men. Ayaémé imposed on Mimi its kina which concerns a fish. But even with all this she was not rid of her kunu of the Ampuku; and one day, something it had not yet done, the latter revealed itself in her and spoke through her mouth. It announced that it would continue to exercise its kunu against the Kotika lineage. They appeased it by sacrifices of red cloth and beer; since then, it seems calm and in rather good humor. It comes into Mimi from time to time and speaks in Saramaka language. They are very afraid of it, but they do not hesitate to question it and ask it for remedies, which it sometimes indicates. It laid on Mimi three gadu kina concerning the acouchy, the agami, and the armadillo.

Organization of the cults of possession. Strictly speaking, no religious brotherhoods exist in Boni country; there are only teachers - bas(2) - who have received their power from another

2. It does not seem advisable to translate this word by "priest." In the minds of the Refugee Blacks, this is a matter of a teacher teaching pupils; they use the same word to designate a European or Creole schoolmaster.

/201 cont./
791 teacher and who teach a small group of disciples - kineki -,
787 without distinction of villages or lineages and under their sole
[794] responsibility; each one, man or woman, is absolutely free to pursue his teaching.

/202/These teachers are not themselves possessed, but they are believed to know the processes which permit the neophyte to obtain possession with the minimum of risks. They accept the
[796] fact, however, that that involves dangers, for one cannot oblige a particular gadu to come into someone, and one may in its place obtain an undesirable gadu.

791 Procedures vary according to the categories of gadu sought.
787 But they involve three elements which are always found in one
796 form or another:

--They begin by teaching the pupil the language of the
[798] divinity, or rudiments at the very least (as we shall point out further on, these languages appear to be in decline); these lessons are private;

--On behalf of a group of pupils, the teacher prepares
[824] infusions of certain leaves which are suited to the divinity in question. It is thought that the god likes these plants and that they have the power to attract it.

In certain cults it is required of the pupil to utter at the
[788] same time formulas inviting the god to come into him. But this is not general; in the cult of the Papa gadu especially, the teachers bathe the students in the greatest silence.

791 At the end of the session, the student is often asked to
787 drink a little of the infusion. One might believe that it is a
824 matter of a process having a physical action, certain plants possibly containing hypnotic substances; but except for one aspect of the cult of the Kumënti of which we shall speak later, this does not seem true; especially about the plants believed to attract the Papa gadu, it seems that they have received this role because of their color or odor. Our feeling is that, at least
[562] for the Papa gadu cult which appeals more especially to women, suggestion plays an essential part.

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153 791 789 796 535 [868] --Pupils are taught, individually or collectively, to dance in the manner of the god. Indeed, each divinity has a characteristic form of dance, which it executes sometimes by using the bodies of its bearers when it comes into them. The pupil must imitate as best he can the individual movements and the rhythm of this dance, while the teacher, using the appropriate drum, beats out the calling formulas.

If the god is satisfied with the student, he will be able to come into him.

791 787 785 153 These exercises appear to have as their goal the creation in the pupils of forms of conditioned reflexes; they have nothing in common with the very harsh ordeals which the medicine man of the Guiana Indians imposes upon himself, and do not involve any form of asceticism. It does not seem that chastity, even temporary, is demanded of the student, any more than fasting or doing anything contrary to his inclinations.

787 791 The idea of a spiritual death and resurrection of the possessed person, with all the ritual it entails: long reclusion of the neophytes, change of name of the one possessed, who is supposed to relearn all the activities of ordinary life, does not appear to have been kept by the Refugee Blacks. In a general [152] way, the atmosphere of solemn seriousness, /203/ of secrecy, and of fear, which characterize the Dahomey cults of possession is not found among them.

791 787 435 [436] These lessons are always paid for and are even very expensive. Payment is made in pieces of cloth, in demijohns of tafia.

Having a Kumfiti amounted in 1958 to at least 25,000 francs. This payment is not only compensation for the teacher; [181] it is the mark of legitimacy. What has not been paid for is not, for the Refugee Blacks, legitimately acquired. We shall come back to this important point later.

/203 cont./

153 789 791 Possession begins progressively; in the beginning the divinity does not find in its bearer sufficient passivity, it does not succeed well in expressing itself through his mouth, spectators observe only incoherent gestures and hear only unintelligible stammerings. The pupil must continue his training for a long time in order to become a suitable bearer.

789 The god, when it has just entered a man, always begins by rendering homage in its language to Masa Gadu, proclaiming that it acts only in his name and by his will.

[576] [198] Then it greets those present, employing formulas which are the exact transposition into its language of the ordinary Boni formulas of politeness; that even if it is getting ready to speak to them in the harshest manner.

The god speaks then in its language, saying not very intelligible things to the audience that appear to be related to what goes on in its country, to its family (for it is believed that these lower gods have a family). Finally, it begins to speak in ordinary language in order to be understood by those present, and answers questions.

796 787 825 Various categories of gods capable of bringing on possession. The Refugee Blacks assume that four categories of lower gods exist:

The first category consists of a series of gods which present themselves to men under very different aspects but which are nevertheless felt to be of the same nature. All speak the Kumenti language, all are well disposed toward men and do not exercise against them the kunu, that is, the curse;

--The Kumenti, which have the appearance of jaguars and live in the bush;

--The Djadja, which have the appearance of ocelots;

--The Opete, which have the appearance of the urubu and which reside in the air;

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The Kumẽnti. These gods are common to the Saramaka (Kromenti) (1), Djuka, and Boni. The Kumẽnti are considered to be benevolent gods and friends of men, so their possession is very much desired. They do not come into men spontaneously, they are obtained only by applying to a teacher. In principle only men can obtain Kumẽnti, while on the other hand only women can have Bũnzunki /sic/.

1. There is no doubt about the origin of this word; it is a deformation of Coromantin, name given in the 18th century to Ashanti country. The "Coromantin Negroes," reputed to be particularly intractable, played a large role in the slave revolts. The Kumenti cult of possession must originally have been a cult peculiar to the Coromantin nation.

The Kumẽnti are specialized in protection against fire and against machete and gun wounds. These dangers hold the largest place among the anxieties of the Refugee Blacks, who spend almost all their life in the bush and with whom nearly all sores become infected and have serious consequences. Thus the Kumẽnti cult holds an important place in their magic; even someone who is not possessed will try to obtain from these gods an ɔbia that will protect him from these various dangers.

The instruction of the disciples of these gods takes as its pattern the procedures described above, but the collective dances appear to play an essential part. The teacher calls on the gods by beating a special rhythm on ordinary drums (apinti) and by uttering invocations punctuated by the rattle of the saka (Indian maraka, that is, hollow calabash provided with a handle and containing seeds).

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153 791 787 786 [789] containing seeds). Sometimes, when a god has entered a pupil, the teacher puts the latter's passivity to the test by insulting the god with the help of the drum. The Kumẽnti gets angry, breaks bottles and swallows ground glass, walks in the fire, hits himself with machete blows, all without any wound resulting, they say, on the body of its bearer.

[302] These frenzied dances, whose participants completely covered with pẽmba (white clay) are as if hallucinated, have a bizarre aspect which is perceptible to some of the Boni themselves. They do not have any secret character and constitute, [522] on the contrary, a fine spectacle for the village people. The spectators double up with laughter at the contortions and strange [521] actions which the gods inspire in those possessed. They are talked about at length /207/ afterward in the evenings, humorists imitating what they saw done there, without any fear whatever of irritating the gods.

791 787 346 Each "teacher for Kumẽnti" owns a small gadu ɔsu in which are lined up the implements of the cult. One finds in general in these chapels a post crudely carved in the shape of a human bust, a block of stone, jaguar skulls, some kɔkɔti (shrub stalks with a spontaneous double bend, thought to be the prop of spirits in the bush), and a saka (maraka), the whole sprinkled with white clay (pẽmba). One finds also beside the door a seat and a trough which are used for the ablutions of the pupils.

153 791 787 788 While bathing his body with the infusion of leaves prepared by the teacher, the neophyte repeats, in ordinary language, a series of invocations: "Come to me, enter into me. But before entering into me, it is necessary to teach me the things of thy country; O God, when thou art in me, may I be able to dance on broken glass without its cutting me; may I be able to dance in fire without its burning me. If tomorrow someone takes a machete to hurt me, he shall not be able to come forward. If someone takes a gun to shoot me, (his weapon) must break, must not be able to take off. If someone is sick, make an ɔbia for him, he must recover."

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153 791 787 The teacher has the pupil turn in a circle around the mortar in which has been prepared the infusion of leaves, until he is dizzy. Alternately he makes him turn and "washes" his body with the infusion. Possession occurs by itself at the end of a certain number of sessions.

[206] [191] In the practices intended to make the gita of Kumẽnti "rise," the absorption of toxic substances enters, especially tobacco juice, method employed by the Indian medicine men. But once the reflexes are created, there is no further need for these substances; the gita appears as soon as the calling procedures are used, which are of two kinds:

--Personal procedures: The man voluntarily calls on his gita while putting on the god's costume and taking a certain posture;

--Outside procedures: The gita may be released from outside either by calling the god by name or by beating the corresponding rhythm on the drum.

787 158 When the pupil begins to feel the gita of Kumẽnti, that is first manifested by trances. We have very often been present at these attacks, which usually come on at night in the forest, but commonly also during the day. The one possessed suddenly lets go of the objects he was holding (for example, if he was in the process of eating, he drops plate and spoon), and rushes forward running through the forest howling rhythmically as if he had become an animal. His eyes are rolled upward, he no longer is conscious of his surroundings; he is not in any way threatening; these fits are totally inoffensive in spite of their [147] impressive aspect. One sees possessed people in this state do things which are difficult to explain, such as running in complete darkness in the most impenetrable underbrush without falling or hurting themselves, or climbing up in a few seconds on a craggy rock which would have been hard to scale in full daylight.

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153 791 789 In proportion as the pupil perfects himself, the god expresses itself more easily with the help of his body, begins to do coordinated acts and to speak. They say that the gita has [195] been "arranged" (seeka). The Kumẽnti speak with a gruff, jerky voice, characteristic, which humorists love to imitate in the evenings' recitals.

In order to call on his gita voluntarily, the pupil crouches down, feet together, throwing pemba from right to left at the level of his feet and uttering the formula: "O Kumẽnti, djumpo ku a mi." Then he remains immobile in this position and waits; possession takes place generally at the end of a few minutes.

796 789 The Kumẽnti which enter thus into men are exclusively male gods; it is known that they have wives because they talk about them, but they never manifest themselves.

[812] The Kumẽnti are generally benevolent; still, no more than any divinity of the Refugee Blacks, do they represent a principle of goodness and justice in itself. They watch in a partial fashion over the interests of their bearers. Thus it is that A...., of the Dipélu II-lo, has a Kumẽnti which reacts in a violent way when it has the impression that danger threatens [158] its bearer. It enters into him suddenly, takes a machete and storms through the village, while people prudently barricade themselves in their houses.

787 789 In certain circumstances, when their trances are particularly intense, the people possessed by Kumẽnti are capable, it is said, of walking in fire, dancing on broken glass, climbing thorny awara palm trees, and even having themselves struck with blows of a machete without any wound resulting from it. Professor de Goeje gives impressive personal testimony on this subject, such as the case of a possessed man who overturned a pail of boiling water on his body (1). Mr. Mathieu, Director of

1. In a note in Mr. W.F. van Lier's work, § 37.

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[976] [825] The Bumba gadu, other gods of the same nature and equally feared, have as bearers other categories of snakes, principally the great anaconda water snakes.

[984] [812] The Voodû, we have said, are feared; they can exercise on a lineage the collective curse called kunu. But, no more than the Kumẽnti do not represent a principle of good, they do not represent a principle of evil. Not all are so badly disposed toward men, and even if one of them is the enemy of a lineage, it is not for that reason badly disposed toward the rest of men. [787] [178] [562] However this may be, the cult of possession of the Papa gadu is not at all in decline among the Boni. According to the cross-checking we have been able to do, of the 670 persons living on the French bank there are at least 40 to 50 who have a Papa gadu, the great majority of them old women.

[787] [784] /211/ The Voodû /sic/ are much feared, and for that very reason much respected. They are oracles which are consulted very often, without consideration of the evil their kunu has done and will still do. A god which exercises the kunu but which is provisionally declared appeased may be consulted without danger; it is always assumed that in any case its bearer, if he respects its commands, has nothing to fear from it.

[787] [562] It is possible that, very unconsciously, women use the fear that the Papa gadu gods inspire in order to maintain their independence and privileged position in Refugee Black society.

[153] [79] [787] [198] [178] [515] [824] [534] Instruction in possession appears to take as a pattern the same principles as that which correspond to the Kumẽnti. It involves the teaching of the Papa language; this language appeared to us to be in decline; in fact, it is used only for formulas of greeting; then the possessed people vaticinate in ordinary language. Instruction in possession also involves daily ablutions with decoctions of leaves; certain of these mixtures are particularly complicated (it is said that they include more than a hundred different kinds of leaves). Instruction is essentially individual; however it also includes dances; on this occasion a

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153 791 789 534 special drum is used, about two meters long and very narrow, devoid of any decoration, which is called lĩŋga dɔ̃ or papa dɔ̃.

787 [562] To call on her gita, the possessed woman (they are almost always women) stands, puts on a piece of cloth which she always keeps nearby and always takes along with her when she travels: this is the garment of the god; it consists of a sort of scarf crossed in front; then she throws white clay, pemba, on her feet from right to left and left to right while invoking the god. Possession is almost immediate. One sees the woman's eyes roll up and her expression become haggard. The god does not cover himself entirely with pemba like the Kumẽnti, he makes himself a sort of headband on the forehead with white clay.

787 788 539 [782] He begins with an invocation to Masa Gadu said in ordinary language.

"Masa gadu, gi mi pimisi, beka mi na pikin nẽ̃ge; ala sani di mi ɔ taki, na yu mu gi mi kaakiti, beka na yu abi mi kaakiti, da mi yɛ̃̃falu gi yu."

"Masa Gadu, I implore you, for I am a humble creature; (in) all that I am going to say, it is you who will give me strength, for my strength is in you; I shall exalt you."

787 788 [198] Next come formulas of welcome to those present, which are the exact translation of the formulas of greeting of everyday life, then songs, all in the Papa language. After about a quarter of an hour, it enters a hut and sits down, answering in ordinary language the questions of those present, always in a singing tone.

787 Possession by Papa gadu does not have the bestial character of possession by Kumẽnti; outside of the dances, it does not involve brutish gestures or bizarre acts; the possessed woman hums softly in a shrill voice, moving with graceful gestures.

[531] /212/ Sometimes she draws strange signs on the huts; the Boni state that that is a kind of writing, that other possessed people

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787 their legs with this white clay; they prophesy in a singing tone, without the usual voice of their bearer's ceasing to be recognizable, expressing themselves in the Saramaka language.

796 The Ampuku have the appearance of men similar to Blacks, but unknown. They reside in the depths of the woods; some are good, others bad. One can gain their good will by [84] worshiping them, which is especially developed in Saramaka country.

796 Baliki, of Kormotibo village, tells of having been present
535 one day at a dance of the Ampuku, when he was traveling to
[103] the Saramaka village of Balen.

"During the day, people went on the paths far into the bush to put down calabashes containing certain herbs. At night were seen to come out of the forest a large number of unknown men, dressed in the manner of the Saramaka. They danced all night, and at dawn left again as they had come."

796 The Ampuku gods, considered to be maleficent gods of
[789] the bush, exercise their influence on everyone. When a person
[824] has slept in the bush, he "washes" himself free of Ampuku with an infusion of leaves of five plants which are part of the secondary flora surrounding the villages and of which the principal plant is the sangaafu (Costus cylindricus).

791 Frequency of possession. In 1956 teachers or bas were very
787 scarce in Boni country. For the Kumenti gods, only S...
(Kotika) remained; for the Papa gadu, since the death of
Antinon (Dju), there remained only M... (Papaïston) and B...
[619] (Asisi). People were commonly going to receive instruction from Djuka teachers in the villages of the Tapanaoni.

787 It would be a great error to believe that nearly all the
562 men have gods. On the contrary, this is an exception. According to the evaluations we were able to make, there is not more than one adult man out of six or seven who is possessed.

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562 On the other hand, possession is much more frequent among
787 women: it can be estimated that on the average, one adult woman out of three or four has a gadu.

162 For example in Boniville, out of 115 persons including
776 about 70 adults, one reckons about 30 gods including 8 to 10
787 Papa gadu, 8 to 10 Kumẽnti, 1 Bunsunki, and 2 Ampuku.

791 Apprenticeship for possession can begin from adult age,
787 but it seems /215/ that in general it is between 35 and 50 that
56 women take heed of obtaining a gadu. Would that not be, very
562 unconsciously, the desire to stay in the limelight and indirectly to keep a hold over men, once the age of sensual attraction is past?

787 Possession continues for life, and it is out of the question for a god to be transmitted before the death of its bearer. For example, in 1957, the centenarian grandmother in Asisi village, Kuluba, still kept her Papa gadu god. She had not participated any more in the dances of possession for long years, but her gita was always consulted.

But it can happen, if a possessed person stops taking part in dances and practicing the rites that have been shown him, that any manifestation ceases at the end of a few years.

We observed that in B... of the Dipélu II lo, in 1948 and 1949. He used to exhibit strong attacks of the gita of Kumẽnti. He stopped his instruction, finding that it was costing too much and was taking time. In 1952 he exhibited only latent manifestations of his gita at rare intervals. In 1956 nothing was any longer observable.

787 It can happen, on the other hand, that attacks of pos-
789 session become so frequent and so strong that the person concerned risks losing his reason; if it concerns a god which did not come of its own initiative, one can try to expel it. In
[824] order to "wash" someone free of a gita, he is made to pass between two rows of Obiaman who hold dry palms, pina tɔngo, in their hands and utter adjurations.

/235 cont./

787 626 182 571 But divination is more than that; the interpretation it gives of the events of daily life is the very mover of the animistic society; presenting calamities /236/ as the punishment of offenses against customary law, it is constantly vitalizing that law, conserving its practical value and its efficacity. What it expresses is not the hidden influence of chiefs or priests -- there are in fact neither chiefs nor priests among the Boni -- but the very consensus of the group, the deep feeling it has of its unity.

787 There are two large categories of divination:

The first consists of calling on a divinity through the medium of its bearer. For that, one applies to a person (of his lineage if possible) who has a gadu. This is a service which is rarely refused. This person employs the appropriate procedure for calling his gita and enters into trances. The god speaks, the question is put to it; if it is well disposed, it may give the explanation or the advice requested. For example, one asks for advice before looking for another sector to make his clearings.

787 776 Suggestible as the Boni may be, they do not fail to perceive that all the gods interrogated do not give the same directions. So they think that certain ones are stronger than others; there are people whose gita is considered to be particularly good, others whom they have stopped consulting entirely. The defunct head of Kotika village, Bayo, used to have a gita so remarkable that people would come from very far to consult it.

[791] [829] [798] The general opinion is, furthermore, that nowadays everything is degenerating and that good gita are no longer seen as in the olden days.

787 [791] These consultations involve only a very modest remuneration, a bottle of tafia at most (1). If it is not a matter of a

1. The remuneration of the possessed person is in question; the god always demands a payment for itself, of variable size according to its whim.

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787 very serious question, the asker contents himself with going to interrogate a divinity in which he has confidence. If, when put to the test, the advice turns out to be bad, he goes to consult others and if he obtains the same advice from two different directions, he stops there. If not, he appeals to the elders of his village to bring into play the processes of divination which they alone know.

[838] [791]

[428] A second category of divinatory procedures consists in the use of "remedies," whose origin is unknown and which are transmitted like a personal belonging.

The process reputed to be the surest, in which everybody has confidence, is called pusu. The instrument is composed simply of a rope made of fibers of the Mauritia (2) palm tree

[824]

[439]

2. Palm tree which grows in the coastal savannas and whose fibers are bought from the Galibi Indians. The word pusu, like gita, kandu, mula, is of Congolese origin. In Kikongo, mpuusu = raffia palm tree.

which has been dipped in an infusion of herbs; it is stretched horizontally between two stakes. The elder brings near it a machete blade heated red-hot, at the same time asking the question. If the answer is positive, the rope is cut when the iron has scarcely touched it. If the answer is no, they state that the red-hot iron remains in contact with the rope for an appreciable length of time without the rope's being cut.

They will say for example: ɛfu na Ampuku siki X, a how a 'ã mu do: fosi a kɔti: If it is an Ampuku which is making X sick, the machete must cut (the rope) before (even) reaching it.

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787 In this way they put a series of questions entailing yes or no answers and which narrow down the problem more and more.

• 791 For this divinatory procedure, they pay the man who has brought it into play three liters of tafia, two pieces of cloth, and one machete.

787 This procedure is put into play to confound thieves and
695 adulterers. The plaintiff publicly calls on the accused to come and undergo the test: Mi ɔ tya yu go a swel! If he refuses, it is the equivalent of a confession.

In 1947, Liki (Aw.B.), accused of having stolen 20 grams of gold by a man from Loka, was thus put to the test. The rope was not cut. He was declared innocent and it was the plaintiff who had to pay the price of the test.

In 1950, the uncle of Tabayé (Dip. I) accused him of having committed adultery with his wife. He denied it, but he was put to the test which gave a positive result; he confessed immediately and begged his uncle's pardon. Then they were reconciled. Of course it was he who paid the price of the test.

787 Another important divinatory procedue is the Kumẽnti bui (ring of Kumẽnti). This is a surprising form of divination by pendulum. The ring, which is made of iberi, is ordinarily kept hidden by its owner. Very few people have any. The ring, suspended at the end of a string, is put in oscillation. Its owner puts a question to it. If the answer is affirmative, it oscillates from right to left. If it is negative, it describes a circle.

[825] Another procedure is sometimes used after a sacrifice to know whether the god has received it favorably: it consists of killing a rooster to examine the color of its testicles: if they are found to be black, the sacrifice has not been accepted.

791 /237 cont./

688 Not just anyone may resort to divination on behalf of
888 someone else: only the eldest have the right to do it, and it has happened that the grand man punished offenders severely.

797 Fate. The Refugee Blacks do not attribute all misfortunes
[752] to suprahuman causes. They have the notion of natural accident, ɔŋgɔɔku. They say ɔŋgɔɔku miti mi, or again ogi miti mi,
[761] misfortune met me. They also accept the idea of natural death. They usually regard as natural death that of the very old, the infirm from birth, and sickly children.

[787] Divination blames fate in ten to 20 per cent of accidents.
[792] It is the usual explanation for hunting accidents.

772 /238/ Magic Forces

As we have shown, the Refugee Blacks consider beings and things as a world of forces capable of acting on one another, outside of time and space, according to laws which men cannot understand but of which they believe they have a partial and empirical knowledge transmitted by tradition since the
754 time of the ancestors. They distinguish negative magic forces,
789 wisi, which have the effect of diminishing the vital force of men, which makes them sick or kills them, and positive magic forces, ɔbia, which come from the gods: the ɔbia comes to increase the vital force of men, giving them protection, immunity, or knowledge. But no power is in essence a principle of good or evil; nothing is impossible for him who knows the formulas; this is why the magic of the Refugee Blacks is reduced to a perpetual and indecisive struggle between ɔbia and wisi.

754 Wisi. Wisi is sorcery in the African sense of the term, that is,
[673] the use of magic procedures to harm others; wisi is for the Refugee Blacks the pre-eminently criminal act, at the same time against morals and against society. The struggle against

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755 823 [174] White clay, pɛmba (the word and the rite are of Congolese origin), does not undergo any special preparation. In the thought of the Refugee Blacks it has the power to fix upon a man's body the magic influence of the infusion of leaves.

791 Among the Boni, except for the cult of Odun, there are no priests, strictly speaking, invested with a function at the same time social and religious. A large number of persons 756 are regarded as "knowing remedies." This notion implies at 791 once knowledge and power. In general the ɔbiamã is believed to hold only a specialized power: for example, he knows how to prepare a hunting ɔbia, or an ɔbia for protection against wisimã. This power he received from his father (as an exception, it seems, from his uncle), who instructed him, before dying, in the specialized rites it requires and transmitted his power to him by giving him mula.

To give mula to someone, one blows into his hands, one puts them on his head while uttering a formula by which one transmits to him a certain power or piece of magic knowledge.

What is the criterion of legitimacy? Who has the right to call himself an ɔbiamã? It seems that basically everything is reduced to this: the ɔbiamã has the conviction, the sensation that he holds this power; as for his clients, they believe they observe the efficacy of his ɔbia; if they stop having confidence in his remedy, they will abstain from coming to ask it of him, that is all; no social prohibition comes to limit the action of [754] the ɔbiamã. The grand man intervenes only against someone who might claim to hold remedies to harm another person or to capture his will, which would be wisi.

[888] /249/ The Boni accept the possibility of deception as regards ɔbia, especially by people who are too young, but they have the conviction that the elders (people over 55-60) possess wisdom and that one can apply to them with complete confidence.

/251 cont./

464 776 decision of the god and under some pretext or other refused to resume work. In August, 1952, while we were on a work trip /en mission/, an ɔbiamã made it known that an Ampuku was willing to give a tapu, that is, an ɔbia of protection, against this Papa gadu. We were present at a discussion in the course of which several Boni planned to take up this work again, but asking for raised wages to cover the expenses of the ɔbia (1).

[465] [171]

1. Situations of this kind are common in the Guianan forest, even among Creoles. For difficult or unusual work, the high wages demanded serve in part to remunerate magicians.

751 435 791 These expenses amounted to about 5,000 francs per person, or:

--3,000 for the payment of the god, including red cloth, dark-blue cloth, white beads, beer, rum, cowries; the ɔbiamã would take them to set them out in the forest.

--1,500 for payment for the work of the ɔbiamã, including a piece of canvas /toile/, beer, a container /bidon/ of powder, a chicken.

751 The remedy would consist of an infusion of leaves with which one should "wash one's body" morning and evening for the duration of the work.

As for the Creole foreman, he prudently had himself assigned to another job.

751 776 They have the habit of asking an Ampuku for protection against a Papa gadu and conversely (we have cited an example of this above), but they do not ask a Kumẽnti for protection; the Kumẽnti occupy themselves only with illnesses.